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# Creek trail takes a middle school detour

*Kevin Forestieri*

It's going to be a tight fit, but the Mountain View Whisman School District is finishing up designs this month to construct an extension of the Permanente Creek Trail through Crittenden Middle School, from Rock Street to Middlefield Road.

In partnership with the city of Mountain View, which will pick up the estimated \$1 million bill for the project, the school district will design the trail to better match up with campus improvements currently underway using Measure G bond funds.

Specific details of the project are not yet available, but the plan is to extend the 1.2-mile trail past Rock Street through the campus, where it will veer slightly east to meet up with the intersection of Farley Street and Middlefield Road.

"We are excited about being able to support bike commuters and create safer bike routes for our kids and others," said Interim Superintendent Kevin Skelly.

Though the district is the one drawing up designs for the path, it

doesn't have free rein over the project. The Mountain View City Council and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee both came out heavily in support of the Farley Street connection, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District has plenty of restrictions and requirements for future maintenance and flood-protection projects.

There's a particularly tight part of the extension that will squeeze the path between the edge of the creek and the school's existing buildings and parking lots, which could encroach on the water district's access for maintenance and could stymie its ability to replace the existing "slope-sided" cement channel in the creek, according to Sue Tippetts, community project manager for the district.

"We need to keep room for everything there," Tippetts said. "We're trying to get the trail in there without having our access needs compromised."

The environmental features of the area are not ideal for maintaining the creek and providing a trail; the creek channel was built "many years ago" and no one had these multiple uses for the area in mind -- the channel was built simply to convey water, Tippetts said.

It's no surprise then that the trail design, which will be sent to the state architect for approval, is currently stalled on this narrow spot that requires 12 feet of easement from the water district, according to Terese McNamee, chief business officer for the school district.

"The school district property doesn't give us enough width," said

Lisa Au, civil engineer for the city. "We need more right of way from the water district."

A 2012 feasibility study by the city explored different ways the trail could weave its way along the next 900 feet through the campus, and at the time it had two opposing alternatives, one favored by the school district and one favored by the bicycle and pedestrian advisory committee.

The school district favored a path that would continue to stay aligned alongside the edge of the creek, which would cause "minimal impact" for the school's parking lot, but would make it difficult for the water district to make improvements to the creek's cement channel and would include the removal of 14 trees.

The committee-favored alternative would have the creek trail diverge onto existing concrete paths through the parking lot, and would line up with the Farley Street crosswalk. City Council members agreed in May 2013 to support the divergent path, and the school district later followed suit when Measure G plans nixed the campus' western parking lot that posed safety concerns for the children on campus.

The City Council is scheduled to revisit the trail extension issue this fall for a formal agreement with the school district, which will include a final construction cost estimate. For now, the project is expected to be paid for with \$500,000 from Shoreline Community funds and \$500,000 from Park Land Dedication funds.

Construction is expected to begin next summer.